

PHILADELPHIA – Today Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) visited Keystone Mercy Health Plan (KMHP) where he spoke to company employees and discussed health care issues for Pennsylvania. He was greeted by Anne Morrissey, President of Pennsylvania Managed Care, and Christopher Drumm, Vice President of Government and External Affairs. Keystone Mercy Health Plan is Pennsylvania's largest Medical Assistance (Medicaid) managed care health plan serving more than more than 273,000 Medical Assistance recipients in Southeastern Pennsylvania including Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties. — “Nearly 800,000 Pennsylvania residents are without health insurance and lack access to our health care system,” said Congressman Sestak. “We must work towards improving health care quality, affordability and accessibility for all.”

According to the U.S. Census, 15.2% of those in Pennsylvania are 65 and older, well above the national average of 12.4%. As a result, Medicaid is the second largest expenditure in Pennsylvania, and the state expects to spend well over \$5 billion on it next fiscal year. Furthermore, the state's Medicaid cost growth over the years has been fueled by rising prescription drug costs.

“The rising cost of health care, the forthcoming entry of the boomers, and the increased longevity of the population suggest that the financial health of Medicaid needs to be fortified, if the program is to continue protecting beneficiaries from the cost of health care,” said the Congressman.

During his visit to the event the Congressman discussed legislative efforts towards improving health care quality and affordability. The Congressman cosponsored and voted for legislation to require the government to negotiate for lower drug prices for American seniors and people with disabilities in the Medicare program.

The Medicare Prescription Drug Negotiation Act of 2007 will help seniors get better prices on prescription medications under Medicare. The provision in the current Medicare Rx Drug law which explicitly forbids the Department of Health and Human Services from conducting such cost-reducing negotiations will be repealed. The Democratic bill will require—not just authorize—the Secretary for Health and Human Services to negotiate with pharmaceutical manufacturers.

In addition, the Congressman spoke about his support for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and expansion efforts that would have covered up to 10 million, low-income children.

"I believe it is essential to the health security of our nation, to ensure that every child in America will be provided with adequate health care coverage, and will continue to fight for SCHIP's passage," said Congressman Sestak.

Furthermore, according to several studies, the United States could face a shortage of 85,000 to 200,000 physicians by 2020. This physician shortage has serious implications for access to care, the quality of care, and the health of those individuals living in rural areas. This is a particularly serious problem in the state of Pennsylvania, where more than 30% of Pennsylvanians (3.7 million people) live in rural areas. In addition, Pennsylvania has a severe distribution of physicians, where almost one-half of the doctors in the state practicing in only 3 counties, even though the remaining 64 counties have almost three-quarters of the population. Overall, 55 of the 67 Pennsylvania counties contain federally designated Health Profession Shortage Areas (HPSAs) or Medically Underserved Areas (MUAs).

To remedy this shortage Congressman Sestak spoke of his support for the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2007 (HR 1093). This legislation will increase federal funding for residency training programs in states with a shortage of residents to meet their health care needs.